

**Testimony**  
**Ruthann Jaquette**  
**Michigan Parent Teacher Association (PTA)**

Thank you, Senator Pavlov, for the opportunity to address the committee today. My name is Ruthann Jaquette and I am the Vice President for Member Resource Development for the Michigan PTA. I am a resident of Grand Ledge and I am the proud mom to four boys all of whom attend or have graduated from the Grand Ledge Public Schools.

Like many thousands of our members, I am a parent volunteer who has spent countless hours working in our schools and with our school district leaders. We have seen first-hand the challenges that our schools face on a daily basis. We have worked hand in hand trying to ensure that every child's potential becomes a reality; this why we believe that the expansion of the Education Achievement Authority of Michigan presents both potential and challenges. Michigan PTA shares the desire to see our state's struggling schools improve. However, we have strong concerns regarding the transparency and accountability around the EAA, and the academic progress of its students.

The research is clear: schools perform better when they benefit from robust community engagement and family-school partnerships. Dr. Joyce Epstein of John Hopkins University showed in her research that a key element of that partnership is shared decision making. The National PTA, in coordination with Dr. Epstein, created the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. Michigan PTA supports and encourages our members to use these standards in their local buildings, not only as a right of parental participation in their child's education but also as a responsibility to their child, their school, and their community.

The important factor from these standards is that families should be full partners in the decisions that affect their children. In Michigan, we accomplish shared decision making, in part, through the election of local school boards. Local control of our schools shows parents that their voices matter in the education of their children and provide for more direct accountability. Under this Act, that accountability disappears.

Efforts currently underway place the EAA outside of local control and outside the control of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent. How are we to achieve shared decision making and meaningful partnerships in the education of our children if we have no voice in selecting school leadership and no mechanism by which to hold school leaders accountable? Is the Governor's office going to begin fielding parent concerns regarding the EAA? Who's listening to families and communities and ensuring they play a role in their children's education?

While we have many broad concerns with this bill, I want to focus on a few specifics.

The bill allows the EAA to establish nonprofit corporations to achieve its goals. Non-profits are not subject to the Open Meetings Act. This provision suggests that legislators who support this bill don't want parents to be involved in the education process at all. Let me be clear: decisions about our children's education should not be made behind closed doors.

This bill would allow the EAA to demolish property it owns or controls without the approval of a local unit of government. Schools are the focal points of communities, and to give an

unelected entity the authority to tear down buildings it doesn't even own threatens those communities. I don't believe you would find it acceptable in your community for someone to have the authority to come into your neighborhood and destroy public property, and neither do the citizens you serve.

This bill would make providing medical and other benefits to the EAA's employees and their dependents optional. If Michigan is to attract high-quality educators, we have to make a commitment to providing them with benefits for themselves and their families. I want the best and brightest teaching my children and all of Michigan's children. Michigan has two of the top 20 teacher education programs in the nation. Do you believe that we will keep that kind of talent teaching Michigan's children if they don't have the assurance of adequate wages and benefits? Would you take a job if you knew the benefits you need to provide for your family were optional?

We can all agree that school reform is essential. We have to improve teaching methods, we have to take advantage of technology, and we have to find better ways to differentiate instruction for children of all learning styles and paces. But does this reform help children learn? Does it help teachers teach? Does it help parents support their child's education? If these basic questions cannot be answered than why are we rushing to expand and codifying into law an experimental education system which hasn't even had time to prove effective? In the 15 schools currently under the EAA, first semester report cards haven't even gone home yet. In one EAA school, leadership withheld meals as punishment for misbehavior, perhaps in violation of federal law. The point being that the EAA is at this time entirely experimental and, in some highly publicized cases, exhibiting incredibly poor judgment. I am baffled as to why some legislators believe now is the right time to make the EAA permanent and give it more powers. As a parent, I do not see the necessity or the wisdom in taking this step.

Michigan PTA believes that our legislators need to make a commitment to public education and to instituting reforms that will provide transparency, accountability, and real academic progress for every student. This bill stifles transparency, removes accountability, and allows more children to become guinea pigs for untested reforms. I fail to see how this bill is a positive step for Michigan's children, and I urge you not to support its passage.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and your service to our State.